

AGENDA ITEM: State Reference Centers Program**BACKGROUND:**

This CLSA program has never been funded by the state. The program and services to be provided are described in Education Code Sections 18760-18764, and the similar (though not identical) LoC services are described in Education Code Section 18853(a).

The CLSA State Reference Centers Program provides for the establishment of two or more statewide reference centers which provide statewide service. It also specifies that one or more of the state reference centers be designated as a "...repository for collections specially relevant to economically disadvantaged and non English-speaking persons." The State Reference Centers Program has not been funded under CLSA.

The LoC program element calls for "access to specialized information expertise and resources statewide to answer information requests generated by its primary clientele that are beyond the capacity or capability of a member institution or public library jurisdiction and its regional library network." It also indicates that "Provision shall be made for information formats specially relevant to culturally diverse populations and persons with disabilities." This service element has not yet been funded by the state under LoC.

A multi-year planning process developed a four-pronged design for the CLSA State Reference Centers Program which encompasses strengthening information services at the local library level (general reference; information services for ethnic populations) and statewide backup for local and System reference services (referral to the most comprehensive/specialized libraries statewide; creation of a "virtual" Ethnic Resource Center that contains online information in multiple formats and languages). In May, 1989 the California Library Services Board discussed and approved this outline for a Statewide Reference Centers Program. This model resulted from extensive discussions with the library community.

In May 1992, the CLSB took further action to determine the approach for the Ethnic Resources portion of the program. At that time the CLSB approved this component to move in the direction of being a Virtual Center. At that same meeting, the CLSB adopted a composite design for the CLSA State Reference Centers Program.

As simultaneous planning occurred for the multitype library network which would expand CLSA's focus from public libraries to all types of libraries under The Library of California, the library community endorsed and adopted the Board's design for the State Reference Centers as the route for the new library network (Exhibit A). The Library of California Act became law on January 1, 1999. The areas authorized for its initial funding relate to Phase I start-up activities, which do not include funding for any state reference services functions.

Budget requests to implement the entire CLSA State Reference Centers Program were submitted in 1992, 1996, 1997, and 1998, but the program was not funded. When the Library of California Act became law on January 1, 1999 the funding authorized for its initial implementation did not include the state reference services programs. As the Library of California program expands, however, funding for the LoC state reference services programs can be requested in the years ahead.

CURRENT STATUS: In accordance with Board direction, the 2001/2002 budget request for Library of California funding did not include any element specifically for the statewide reference components of the Act, pending staff and Board work on further defining those components.

Work does continue, using LSTA funds, to test and refine potential CLSA and LoC reference services components, as described below.

FIRST SOURCE:

An LSTA grant for 2000/2001 was funded effective October 1, 2000 to continue testing and refinement of this statewide reference services component through the Los Angeles Public Library, which provides access to 200-plus online databases to all CLSA System Reference Centers and, this year, to six individual rural libraries. The added rural library component is intended to further test the viability of this centralized method of providing access to a broad range of database, along with materials delivery, and an extensive technical assistance element. It is conceivable that this program element could be expanded, with the concurrence of the Los Angeles Public Library to directly serve other, non-public libraries in the state, if this initial test proves successful. Staff will provide the board reports on the progress of the various test elements of this project as they proceed.

VIRTUAL ETHNIC RESOURCE CENTER (VERC)

As described to the Board in detail earlier this year, the VERC has been mounted on a website with three information modules: "Healthy Mom, Healthy Baby" (English and Spanish), "Understanding the Law" (English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean), and "African-American Photographs" (English). This information is available online at www.verc.org. Publicity information has been mailed to community centers statewide and a mailing to libraries of all types is planned for the near future. It is expected that, if found useful by a large number of libraries, this program could become a part of the Board's efforts to better serve the underserved.

This, currently, is a demonstration project, funded with a combination of private and federal LSTA funds through March 31, 2001. Its continuation beyond Mar. 31, 2001 is contingent on Board decisions on its direction regarding methods and timing for addressing the information needs of different underserved populations. Further discussion regarding this test will take place at the February 2001 Board meeting, following release of the Governor's 2001/2002 budget.

REVIEW OF CLSA AND LOC REFERENCE CENTERS PROGRAMS

It was proposed at the August 2000 Board meeting that a formal review of the statewide reference components of these programs be undertaken to provide the Board with recommendations for the future, overall design of them. This review is still in the planning stages and will not show real progress until the Library Programs Consultant position charged with reference and resource libraries program development is hired. Full scale efforts are underway to get that position filled as soon as possible, and staff hopes to have the position filled and the programs review well underway by the February 2001 Board meeting.

RELATED ISSUES TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD IN THE FUTURE:

1. Consider report on review of the 1992 CLSA State Reference Centers model and possible alternative implementations of state reference services under the Library of California Act.
2. Review results of studies and projects now underway, including the pilot project involving System Reference Centers and rural library access to First Source services, the Virtual Ethnic Resource Center, and the Consumer Health Information Service program in Riverside.

Relevant Committee: Access Services
Staff Liaison: Liz Gibson